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# ESSAY ON THE LIFE, THE WRITINGS, AND THE DOCTRINE OF THE ANABAPTIST, HANS DENK

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STRASBOURG FACULTY OF PROTESTANT THEOLOGY

Essay on

THE LIFE, THE WRITINGS, AND THE DOCTRINE  
of  
THE ANABAPTIST, HANS DENK

Presented to the Strasbourg Faculty  
of Protestant Theology  
and publicly affirmed  
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By  
GUSTAVE GUILLAUME RŒHRICH  
of Fürdenheim (the Lower Rhine)

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1853

TO MY FATHER

To My Friends

P. ANSTETT and E. BÖCKEL

In memory of our friendship

G. RÖHRICH

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their gratitude to Mr. John P. Rosso,  
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## Translators' Preface

In the Footnotes, inconsistencies in orthography, use of abbreviations, capitalization, and format reflect variations found in the original manuscript.

Titles of the author's source materials are translated only if the title contributes to an understanding of the subject matter of the essay.



## Translator's Introduction

Gustave Guillaume Rœhrich's **ESSAY ON THE LIFE, THE WRITINGS, AND THE DOCTRINE OF THE ANABAPTIST, HANS DENK** has become a seminal study not only of the life and work of Hans Denk but also of the radical theology of the sixteenth century. In addition, the Rœhrich essay has made a contribution to the understanding of Protestant orthodoxy of the sixteenth century for, by contrasting the radical with the more widely accepted doctrines, Rœhrich has brought into sharper focus the theology of Luther and other leading reformers. In the twentieth century the significance of sixteenth century theology is reflected in the Marxist claim on Thomas Müntzer and reevaluation of Martin Luther, the Mennonite claim on the Swiss Anabaptists, and the Unitarian sympathy for Michael Servetus and Faustus Socinus. The doctrines espoused by Hans Denk and other sixteenth century radicals indicate the variety of theological persuasions provoked by the Reformation. Modern ecumenical pluralism is not incompatible with the diversity of sixteenth century religious thought surveyed in Rœhrich's essay.

## INTRODUCTION

The only goal of the reformers as they began to speak out against the established Church was to restore its functional sanctifying power. They wanted to discard the abuses which had been introduced, to eradicate their causes, and to change the conditions which allowed the abuses to continue. At the same time, they did not want to destroy the Church, for they never questioned its divine origin. They harbored no revolutionary tendencies; indeed, they rejected only those dogmas in conflict with the Holy Scriptures. Otherwise, they made few suggestions for change.

But this moderation did not suit everyone's mood. Then, as now, certain men who were of less intelligence, fewer talents, and less noble intent than were the reformers felt called to head a more impetuous and radical movement. All that they regarded as contrary to the Gospel had to be eliminated. In principle they were united in heart and soul with the reformers, but their immoderate zeal, their philosophic tendencies, and some other factors led them farther. Not satisfied with a conservative approach or the slow progress of the leaders, they demanded revolutionary departure from the old doctrine. Their ideal, a religious society and a new political order, would rise from the ruins of the already existing society. They dreamed of social regeneration even at the cost of war and bloodshed.

Several revolts were incited but were quickly repressed. The spiritual force exercised by Luther in Germany and Zwingli in Switzerland, along with the physical force of the governments, restrained this dangerous movement before its radical ideas could be implemented. The adherents were persecuted. Indeed, traditionalists, such as the papists, forgot that freedom of conscience is one of the most precious privileges of the individual. However, even violence could not eradicate the movement, for the ideas persisted. They were echoed here and there through the cities and countryside. Spontaneous demonstrations, often excessive in nature, manifested fairly strong opposition to civil and especially to ecclesiastical authority.

Radical tendencies were characteristic of some of the Anabaptists and of another group, the Unitarians. For many centuries Unitarian ideas seemed alien to Christian theology. Unitarians were less critical of Christian practices than of Church teachings; therefore, the Unitarians wanted to revise Church doctrine. Their position was strikingly symptomatic of the reawakening of humanism, so long repressed by medieval dogma.

Meanwhile, the reformers could not have been indifferent to what was taking place. They feared, not without cause, that the radicals would

disclaim responsibility for the bizarre and regrettable effects developing in rapid succession from their combined actions. The reformers feared also that their work would be compromised by the acts of violence, that progress would be halted, that the best and wisest Christians would be repulsed, and that the infant Church, still weak and tottering, would succumb to confusion and dissolution brought about by radical doctrines. Furthermore, any sect attacking any of the fundamental doctrines of the Church aroused the ire of the reformers. Therefore, the conduct of the founders of the Protestant Church toward the members of various sects was often less than charitable.

As we have observed, the main goal of the Anabaptists was the destruction of all that remained of the Roman Church. However, since the Anabaptists were a heterogeneous group, we would be grossly misled if we expected to find unity of doctrine or even of organization within their ranks. Any man who could gain recognition for his knowledge of literature, for his oratory, or for avant-garde religious and philosophic ideas, might assume the leadership of a sect. He did not need to consult with his coreligionists or show any consideration for them. He needed only his violence, his fanaticism, and his spiritual pride. He was characterized mainly by the means which he employed to gain an end. To destroy the remains of the old cult and to form a new community of saints, the ambitious leader was willing to resort to violence. He instituted conventicles and glorified himself by claiming divine inspiration. He expressed his opinions so fanatically and radically that it was sometimes impossible to doubt his mental derangement.

Some more reserved and moderate leaders, along with their followers, were satisfied to withdraw quietly from the Church whose doctrine repelled them. They caused no public unrest and they did not resort to violence to gain their religious freedom. Frequently, it was the inflexibility and the intolerance of the orthodox which necessitated separation. The fate of the man whose life and doctrines are here brought to light will demonstrate the expediency of avoiding confrontation.

## THE LIFE OF DENK

From the few facts recorded about the life of Denk, it is impossible to determine the place and year of his birth. Originally from upper Germany,<sup>1</sup> he must have been born toward the end of the fifteenth century. At least this time of birth is suggested in a letter which the scholar Vadianus (Joachim de Watt) of Saint-Gall wrote to lament the premature death of Denk, a promising and talented young man.<sup>2</sup> A deep love of knowledge, especially of ancient literature, must have inspired him at an early age. According to his contemporaries, he was fluent in Latin and Greek. In addition, it is evident that he was familiar with Hebrew, since he made a major contribution to the translation of the prophets of the Old Testament, published at Worms as Prophets of Worms by his friend Louis Hetzer.

Denk's literary career began at Basel where he found himself in an academic setting. Toward the end of 1522, he was proofreader for the Cratander printing house. Later, he was proofreader for the printing house of Valentin Curio. He became a close friend of Œcolampade, who, like many other outstanding scholars of the time, was also a proofreader. The ties of friendship were later severed because of Denk's unorthodox opinions. However, on his deathbed Denk turned again to his former colleague and reminded him in touching words of their past relationship:

In memoria etiam nunc habeo, quo tu, mi Œcolampade, animo in me fueris, dum hic apud Curionem agerem; memini quam amice, quam familiariter et fraterne me acceperis primum, acceptum deinde amplexus fueris.<sup>3</sup>

While he was at Basel, Denk was stimulated by the cultural climate of the sophisticated and liberal city. For example, he often went to lectures given by Œcolampade on the prophet Isaiah.<sup>4</sup> In his lectures the theologian tried to present sympathetically the ideas for reform, and he made every effort to sow the seeds for change in the minds of his listeners. Thus Œcolampade fought energetically and successfully against the Church of Rome. It was no doubt through his influence that Denk joined the new religious sect, but the two men continued to discuss literature more often than they discussed theology.<sup>5</sup>

However, since Denk needed a larger sphere, the young humanist sought broader horizons. He made his first attempts in the very demanding art of teaching and winning the affection of his students. On the recommendation of Œcolampade to Pirkheimer, the scholar responsible for promoting Renaissance learning in Nuremberg, Denk was employed there as the rector or regent of the Saint-Sébal school, associated with the most eminent

parish of the city. Not only because of its wealth and extensive trade but also because of its literary activity and its involvement in the political and religious movements of the day, Nuremberg was then at the height of its power and glory. Indeed, its leading citizens had sided with Luther and had championed the good cause long before the Reformation was officially recognized (1525) in the city.<sup>6</sup>

Denk arrived in Nuremberg toward the end of 1523. Did he already entertain those deviate opinions which later set him at variance with the city fathers? If he had held these opinions at that time, it seems unlikely that Oecolampade, who was surely familiar with Denk's theology, would have recommended Denk so highly to friends in Nuremberg. Nevertheless, it is probable that Denk's relationship with Pirkheimer and the two religious teachers Dominique Schleupner and André Osiander was never very close. Pirkheimer, as a result of his association with Oecolampade, adhered to the Swiss view of Holy Communion. The Nurembergers, on the other hand, zealously supported Luther's view. However, the ill-fated discussions of this issue had not yet embittered minds and divided the Reformation into two enemy camps; therefore, without risking persecution, Denk was able to remain at Nuremberg.

Nevertheless, the vivacious and outgoing Denk was oppressed by his isolation. He realized that he was only tolerated in his new location; yet he needed friends of his persuasion. Not finding them in the most influential group, he circulated elsewhere and soon found them. The origin of the political and religious radicalism that he later professed can be traced to his new environment. Suddenly he became associated with Thomas Müntzer and with Louis Hetzer, who was thenceforth his friend and inseparable companion.

Louis Hetzer was an erudite priest from Thurgau. A man of remarkable talents but of a weak and immoral character, he allowed his pride and vanity to lead him into all sorts of errors and an undisciplined life style. Rejected everywhere because of his folly, he sought refuge from city to city. Thus he traveled from Basel to Zurich, to Nuremberg and from there with Denk to Augsburg, to Strasbourg, to Worms, where the two friends published the aforementioned translation of the prophets. After a long imprisonment, Hetzer was put to death in Constance on February 4, 1529. His execution was not because of his theological opinions regarding baptism and the Trinity, but according to Sebastian Frank, because of his corrupt morals and scandalous life.<sup>7</sup> He had even defended his frequent acts of adultery by proclaiming them inspired by the Holy Scriptures. Before his death, however, he must have been converted, for he died a Christian.<sup>8</sup>

Hetzer was an avowed anti-Trinitarian before his friendship with Denk.<sup>9</sup> He had even written a book to explain his ideas about Christ, but, on the advice of Zwingli, with whom he was associated, Hetzer did not publish his book.<sup>10</sup>

He entertained still other unorthodox ideas. For example, he maintained that man does not need the Bible to arrive at a knowledge of God since all of His creatures, all of His works proclaim and effectively preach God's existence. From the Bible alone, man cannot understand Him. The individual who seeks God everywhere will find Him nowhere unless the person is in God and God is in him. Only he who has known pain, deprivation, and persecution--he who has traveled the way of Christ--can truly understand the Scriptures. He who has not known Christ's life can speak of the divine only as hearsay. He comprehends God no better than the blind comprehend color. Persecutions and hardships are necessary if man is to hear and understand the living voice of God.<sup>11</sup>

The most important of Hetzer's ideas were expressed again by Denk.

The personality of Thomas Müntzer is readily identified as the second element of influence on Denk. Müntzer was forced to leave Altstedt, where he was pastor, because of trouble and disorder which he and his followers instigated. He sought refuge in Nuremberg where within a few days he found so many sects that he could boast that the tranquillity of the city could be disrupted at his pleasure. He spared neither the spoken nor the written word to proselyte, but it was not until his harshest denunciation.<sup>12</sup> of the Wittenberg reformers was printed in the city that he was exiled.<sup>13</sup>

Denk soon became one of the most zealous followers of the prophet of Altstedt. His polemic against "the Pharisees" of Wittenberg and against justification by faith to which the reformers subscribed and his belief in an inner voice of the living God and in the divine Word within, which, without mediator, makes the Omnipotent known to man, found in Denk a staunch supporter and formed the basis of his religious convictions. Denk no longer hesitated to avow publicly and to preach these doctrines.

The anti-Trinitarian ideas which Denk and his friends propounded at this time were the most damaging to them. According to a letter from Capito to Zwingli,<sup>14</sup> these ideas gave rise to the accusations subsequently leveled against Denk and his friends. This information, along with the fact that in 1523 Hetzer had written his book denying the deity of Christ, suggests that Hetzer, like Denk, was among the first to oppose the doctrine of the Trinity as formulated by the Church.

Furthermore, Denk opposed the position of the Nuremberg church on Holy Communion and on the Peasants' War, which erupted in 1524 in the vicinity. The Anabaptists were thought to have instigated this uprising. Consequently, the magistrate of the city felt free to act vigorously against these self-proclaimed prophets. Denk was accused of having preached and spread all sorts of anti-Christian heresies, which, despite the insistence of his patrons, he was unwilling to confess and retract. Therefore, he was discharged in July 1524 and was ordered again to leave the city before nightfall and never again to come within ten leagues of the city limits.<sup>15</sup>

Shortly thereafter, Thomas Müntzer and his best known followers were issued the same orders.<sup>16</sup>

Many others suffered as a result of the strife. Notably, OEcAMPade, who repeatedly had proven his fondness for Denk, was drawn by Denk's exile into vituperous confrontation with Pirkheimer, who accused OEcAMPade of fathering all the heresies. Several letters, hardly polite, bear record of the accusations which the two doctors leveled at each other.<sup>17</sup>

It is not clear where Denk went when he left Nuremberg.<sup>18</sup> It seems that Müntzer had arranged for Denk to meet him in Mülhausen in Thuringia, where Müntzer had settled and had accepted the offices from which he had just been dismissed in Nuremberg. Wielding both secular and ecclesiastical power, Müntzer governed the city tyrannically and even established headquarters for insurgent peasants. However, it has not been established that Denk reported there and in fact remained there until the Battle of Frankenhausen, May 18, 1525, ended the control of the Anabaptists.

Nevertheless, later in the same year Denk was definitely at Saint-Gall, the principal seat of the Swiss Anabaptists. The most unbridled fanaticism reigned there.<sup>19</sup> The population of the city and the surrounding countryside was so frenzied by the exhortations and Biblical interpretations that the most horrible scenes<sup>20</sup> became commonplace, especially when the Zurich refugees arrived at the beginning of 1525. Exiled as a result of their conferences with Zwingli and his colleagues, these refugees, led by Grebel, Manz, and others, wreaked havoc in the ill-fated city, whose government was not strong enough to take vigorous action against the troublemakers.

Denk lived in this environment for some time. However, his ties with the Anabaptists were not as close as were those with their arch enemy, the learned Vadianus, Grebel's father-in-law. In spite of Denk's peculiar opinions, Vadianus loved and respected this young man, acclaimed for his knowledge and love of learning.<sup>21</sup>

Denk did not remain long at Saint-Gall. At the invitation of Hetzer, who had been living for a short time in Augsburg, Denk went there and joined his friend to start a new mission. Until that time, Denk had been only a disciple, but he became a missionary, and, in turn, an apostle. Through the united efforts of Hetzer and Denk, Augsburg soon became an important center of the Anabaptist movement, and Denk was one of the best known leaders.<sup>22</sup>

However, this state of affairs did not last. Because of an imprudent attack on the Lutheran clergyman Urbanus Rhegius, Hetzer, a sacramentarian and Anabaptist, was forced to leave the city. He sought refuge in Basel, where Oecolampade welcomed the martyr of the Swiss doctrine.<sup>23</sup>

Denk remained nearly fifteen months in Augsburg.<sup>24</sup> According to the account of a contemporary,<sup>25</sup> Denk was neither noble nor loyal. He is portrayed as dissembling, unethical, and hypocritical.

While publicly he was in complete agreement with the clergymen of the evangelical community, secretly he was spreading his own doctrine. He attracted many followers, whom he baptized according to his peculiar baptismal rite.<sup>26</sup> Yet the accusations of hypocrisy and dissimulation seem unwarranted. Convinced as he was of the validity of his ideas, it was to be expected that he would try to implement them to the greatest extent possible. To maintain leadership and to attract new followers to his sect, it was necessary to avoid public uproar. Thus his actions were neither shameful nor disloyal.

His success at Augsburg was remarkable. He owed his achievement partly to his enthusiasm, his zeal, his outstanding qualities, and partly to the religious dissensions which deepened the hatred between the followers of Luther and those of Zwingli. The people of Augsburg did not have a strong focal point, a central figure around whom to rally, a leader who could have given a common stamp to their religious beliefs. On the contrary, the pastors were divided among themselves. Because of their bitter polemic, their followers, not knowing whom to believe, flocked to the first newcomer whose charisma or miracles lured them.

Of course, this state of affairs could not last. Denk's covert activities were discovered and denounced, and he was obliged to flee in order to escape the kind of proceedings to which he had been subjected in Nuremberg. He left Augsburg in the autumn of 1526 and went directly to Strasbourg, where in December some of his friends incited strong opposition to the reformers and provoked repeated confrontations with them.<sup>27</sup>



At this time, Strasbourg offered asylum to the malcontents of all theological and religious persuasions. During this troubled period, the leaders and, in general, the townspeople practiced an admirable Christian charity that attracted throngs of refugees who had been persecuted because of their opposition to the old Roman Church or to the new Lutheran orthodoxy. Indeed, the magistrate granted asylum to almost all of the unfortunates who agreed not to incite unrest. Carlstadt and Hubmeyer and later Schwenkfeldt and Hoffman, who had chosen the city as their New Jerusalem, enjoyed the urban hospitality for a rather long time. They were not evicted until a large number of their followers disturbed the peace.

Before long a significant number of the bourgeoisie of Strasbourg joined the fanatical organizations, which often constituted a threat to public order. Then the magistrate intervened; he enforced several laws against refugees. Citizens were not allowed to receive and harbor suspects, who were in fact expelled from the city. However, the population tacitly rebelled so effectively that most of the outsiders returned with impunity and with renewed ardor pursued their activities. Thus from all sides the Strasbourg clergymen were accused of making common cause with the Anabaptist agitators.<sup>28</sup>

Only later, after the nature of these sects had been revealed by bloodshed and other extremes, were more energetic and effective measures taken. Thereupon, the hope of transforming Strasbourg into the New Jerusalem vanished.

From 1524 exponents of Anabaptist doctrine had been in Strasbourg. Nicolas Storch, the famous companion of Thomas Müntzer, had sought asylum there. Some fanatical disciples had followed Storch and had prepared the way for religious radicalism.<sup>29</sup> When Denk with his constant companion Hetzer arrived three years later, they simply continued the work of their predecessors.

Already known in Strasbourg as eminent scholars and very accomplished students of ancient languages, Denk and Hetzer were warmly received by Butzer and Capito. For a while Hetzer was a boarder at Capito's home, but he was evicted from the house and from the city because of his immorality and scandalous life style.<sup>30</sup>

Denk remained in Strasbourg only a short time, for when he began to preach his own ideas and views, the attitude of his friends understandably changed completely. They recognized his talents and his scholarship, but they believed that his doctrine would destroy Christianity and render it useless or at least less effective.<sup>31</sup> It was absolutely necessary to stop him,

especially since his zeal and unusual enthusiasm, the eloquence of his preaching and teaching, his irreproachable life style, and his modesty and reserve in public endeared him to the people and drew many followers.<sup>32</sup> However, at first no one wished to take harsh measures against him. His critics appealed to his moderation and his good sense and tried to persuade him to conform to the doctrines accepted by the reformers. In order to bring him back into the Church, which he had left, the magistrate and clergy suggested a conference to discuss and clarify principal differences. The conference took place, and one of Denk's writings was used as a basis for discussion,<sup>33</sup> but the result was not the desired outcome. Like most contests of wits, the conference served only to confuse, to rouse tempers, and to make reconciliation more difficult than ever before. It might be concluded that the judgment was not favorable to Denk. Although he insisted that in fundamental principles he did not deviate from his antagonists, the clergy believed that they perceived differences significant enough to prompt them to solicit the magistrate to expel Denk,<sup>34</sup> who was ordered to leave the city. Denk left December 26, 1526, three days after the conference of December 22 and hardly a month after his arrival in Strasbourg.<sup>35</sup>

Denk spent some time in other parts of Alsace. Early in January of 1527, he was in Bergzabern with Pastor Nicolas Sigelsspach<sup>36</sup> and busied himself most of all with the Jews, whom he tried to convert to Christianity. He instigated a theological dialogue, but his effort was wasted. He did not win a single convert.<sup>37</sup>

Worms became the next scene of action for Denk. Hetzer rejoined him there. It was there that they published the aforementioned translation of the prophets of the Old Testament. Even their theological adversaries were forced to recognize the literary value of the work of the translators.

It was in this city also that Denk met his most loyal and ambitious disciple, who joined the fray against the Strasbourg theologians. The young pastor of the reformed congregation of Worms, Jacques Kautz of Bockenheim, had been intimately associated with Butzer and Capito, but Kautz suddenly renounced the teachings of his former mentors and embraced those of Denk. Kautz felt obliged to oppose any adversary of his new friend. Therefore, Kautz wrote and circulated seven theses setting forth the core of the Denk doctrine. On June 13, 1526,<sup>38</sup> in Worms, Kautz defended these theses in which he rejected the written Word, the Holy Scriptures, and insisted on the still, small inner voice of God which alone quickens. He condemned infant baptism, denied the expiation of sin through Christ's death and the doctrine of original sin as defined by the

Church, and defended with all his might the moral liberty of man. Finally Kautz demonstrated that he understood thoroughly Denk's teaching, which he had absorbed, and that he was as firmly convinced of this doctrine as was his mentor. He soon felt the effects of his change of opinion. Kautz' attacks were not unnoticed; they were answered by the clergy of Strasbourg, who, through Butzer, no doubt, published a refutation of these theses to alert the faithful and to apprise them of the errors of Denk and Kautz.<sup>39</sup> Butzer's polemic is as significant for its moderation and charity as for its disassociation with and its opposition to whatever is not based on the Scriptures. Consistently the tone is less dogmatic than that of the modern theological polemics which do not appeal to reason. However, it is possible that the moderation reflects the indecision of the Strasbourg clergy on some controversial points. Indeed, such temperance is rare among the intellectuals of Denk's day.

However, the position of the clergy was not without influence. To quell the turmoil that he had already incited, Kautz was evicted, and the magistrate of Worms requested the Strasbourg clergy to replace Kautz with a stronger and more conscientious successor.<sup>40</sup> Kautz' two friends, exiled with him, resumed their vagabond life, but only for a short time, for death awaited both of them. Death would give them the reprieve that they had never found on this earth.

Details of their fate after their departure from Worms are not known. They continued to wander from one country to another, where their names and their tenets of faith were only too well known. They could no longer find refuge other than in Switzerland. It was there that Denk and Hetzer had first found friends and protectors, and it was to Switzerland that the two men decided to return, hoping that discussions of dogma would not give new cause for excommunication. They separated, and Hetzer went to the outskirts of Constance, where he was soon taken prisoner and, for reasons given previously, led to the scaffold in 1529.

Denk, on the other hand, turned toward Basel. To assure his acceptance despite their theological differences, Denk wrote to Ecolampade to ask permission to spend time in the city. Denk's confidence in his former protector, Ecolampade, was not betrayed. Permission was granted, but only for a very limited time could Denk enjoy a tranquil life. The plague, which besieged the city, claimed the unfortunate Denk along with many others during the year of 1528.<sup>41</sup> One of his last acts was to attempt reconciliation with his adversaries. To Ecolampade Denk submitted a retraction which was not a disavowal of Denk's former teachings but an acknowledgment of truth in Ecolampade's teachings. In the hope of assuaging the anger and hatred from which Denk had suffered throughout his life, he simply modified his stance.<sup>42</sup>

## WRITINGS AND DOCTRINE OF DENK

Now we must attack the most difficult part of our task. By tracing our author's principal doctrines as they were outlined in his various works, we must come to an understanding of the spirit of his teachings in order to comprehend their scientific value. Our perception of his system of theology and religion will result exclusively from his writings.

First let us consider the writings themselves. What format did the author use? What are their characteristics, their style, their content, in short? Not one of these works is very long. They are short German essays, very concise, of only a few pages in length; nevertheless, despite their brevity, they aroused bitterness and apprehension in the author's orthodox contemporaries, and they demonstrated that Denk perfectly understood human nature. He knew that, to gain influence, he did not need to write long dissertations in a foreign tongue or endless volumes which would leave the people indifferent, for he rarely had either time or inclination to pursue scientific discussions. Oral instruction and short essays--spirited, readily understandable, without theological jargon, presenting only the results of the questioning, without scholarly pretensions--these were the effective tools. Denk understood what was needed. He followed the example of the apostles and the reformers, and the preliminary section of this research indicates that his success was almost equal to theirs.

His style, aside from that of a few isolated pages and several of his expressions of which the exact meaning cannot be determined, has much appeal. It is simple and not too rhetorical. The enthusiasm of the author pervades his articles and captivates the reader. Denk bares his soul, pulsating with a desire to learn the truth. Denk is convinced that he has indeed discovered truth and that his adversaries are deceived.

One might expect that Denk's enthusiasm would lead him into excesses, that his response to violent attacks would be as spirited as were his theological essays, that his books would be filled with invectives and recriminations against the orthodox who persecuted him to the end of his days. Unexpectedly, however, the absence of such vituperations is one of the characteristics of Denk's style. The bitter and violent polemics of his contemporaries are foreign to Denk. He presents his point of view with such modesty, gentleness, charity, and deference for the opinion of others that he seems to be at peace with everyone; yet he in no way conceals his convictions. On the contrary, he proclaims them not only without ostentation but also without hypocrisy. He does not try to impose his beliefs upon others; he asks only for freedom of conscience and tolerance, which he in turn is ready to extend.

Denk's prolonged stay in Augsburg gives rise to the supposition that he wrote most of his works there. The quietude, as opposed to the endless persecution which preceded and followed this respite, favored literary activity. However, because most of his works were published with no indication of place or time of publication, it is impossible to prove that they were written in Augsburg. Prudence taught him not to arouse the suspicions of the authorities prematurely. Therefore, the chronological order of his works cannot be ascertained. They will be considered here in order of importance.

1. What the Scriptures Mean by Asserting That God Does and Creates Good and Evil. Is It to Be Sanctioned That One Excuse Himself from Sin and Ascribe the Evil to God? This is the only one of Denk's writings for which the publication date, 1526, is known.<sup>43</sup> In the preface Denk claims authorship.

He considers here the question often raised, Is God responsible for the evil in the world? He concludes on the basis of subtle reasoning and arbitrary decisions that God is not the author of evil. He will have more to say on the subject later. His format is a dialogue between author and reader.

Probably from the same period<sup>44</sup> is the book entitled—2. Concerning the Law of God. How the Law Is Suspended and Nevertheless Must Be Fulfilled. The format is similar to that of the preceding book. The content is a consideration of St. Paul's ideas presented in the letter to the Romans. Love of God and faith in Him are the eternal goal toward which all human efforts must reach. If this love and faith are realized, there remains no need for laws or religious ceremonies or outward manifestations, which are useless, but until love and faith have been achieved, the law is necessary to restrain carnal passions and to lead to reform, to conversion, and to the love of God.

3. God's Order and His Creative Work: to Destroy the Insubstantial, Vain Preaching of the False Elect in Order That Truth Might Prevail and in Order to Accomplish the Eternal, Unchangeable Pleasure of God. With the epigraph, I Thess. 5:19-21, "Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." This is incontestably one of the most important of Denk's writings. In twelve short chapters he explains his answers to several questions of Christian dogma.<sup>45</sup> Explanation of the Denk doctrine will be considered later.

4. Concerning True Love, etc., with the same epigraph from I Thess. 5. This is the sequel necessitated by the preceding work. The author establishes man's love for God as the fundamental principal of all religion. He presents Jesus as the model for this love and explores the relationship of Jesus with

God and men. Other questions are considered, as the “et cetera” of the title indicates. Denk says no to the legitimacy of infant baptism, vows and oaths, Holy Communion, and civil and religious authority, for the man who truly loves God does not need these institutions. They have no place in the life of the true Christian, who never subscribes to them. They serve only to conceal the true state of the soul.

#### 5. Hans Denk's Recantation of the Ten Following Articles:

1) “Concerning the Scriptures,” 2) “Concerning the Redemption of Christ,” 3) “Concerning Faith,” 4) “Concerning Free Will,” 5) “Concerning Good Works,” 6) “Concerning Satan,” 7) “Concerning Ordinances,” 8) “Concerning Baptism,” 9) “Concerning the Eucharist,” 10) “Concerning the Oath.” – “But he that is spiritual judgeth all things.” I. Cor. 2:15. At this juncture one must not think that Denk, in his last moments, dreamed of retracting the theories for which he had suffered throughout his life and that he united wholeheartedly with the orthodox. He remained faithful to his former convictions, but he expressed them in milder and less offensive terms, mitigating as much as possible the difference between his personal opinions and those which were generally accepted. Only in this way could he appease, at least partially, his former adversaries.

6. The best known work of Denk and his friend Hetzer is the translation of the prophetic books of the Old Testament. The translation appeared first in Worms in 1527<sup>46</sup> under the title All the Prophets Translated Out of Hebrew into German. (Worms: House of Schöffner, folio, with the epigraph, “O God redeem the imprisoned,” and a preface by Hetzer, dated April 3, 1527.) Hetzer mentioned Denk, his loyal and conscientious collaborator. However, it would be difficult to ascertain which parts of this work should be credited to each of the two scholars. The advertisements of the time consistently indicate that Hetzer assumed the greater responsibility. Of course, no purpose would be served by contesting Hetzer's contribution.<sup>47</sup>

Aside from these works, which we have seen and studied, the following are attributed to Denk:

7. Scriptural Order of a True Christian for the Responsibility for the Inception of Faith<sup>48</sup>
8. Scriptural Report and Witness Concerning the Correct Child Baptism, Eucharist, Congregation, Civil Authority, and Marriage<sup>49</sup>
9. Micah the Prophet, As Hans Denk Has Applied Him to This Time<sup>50</sup>
10. Conclusion to the German Theology.<sup>51</sup>

And finally 11, Paradoxes in the Holy Scriptures,<sup>52</sup> is a book in which the author tries to prove that the contradictions encountered in the Scriptures

cannot be blotted out and resolved except by a believing spirit. An intellectual approach will never surmount this obstacle.

All of these works very soon became extremely rare, so that the first editions no longer exist; but someone, probably a follower of Denk, had them reprinted. The collection, entitled "Geistliches Blumengärtlein," contained the six treatises named first. Amsterdam was given as the place of publication, but it is thought that the book actually appeared in Germany.<sup>53</sup>

Listed above are the known works of Denk. It is not impossible that he wrote others, but no reference to them is given in our sources. In any case these works serve to define the author's system of theology. They throw enough light on the subject for us to deduce from their main characteristics an image of their remarkable author.

However, it is not easy to structure all of Denk's precepts in one outline under one scientific name. His doctrines defy such definition.

To understand more clearly these disorganized, incoherent, and often contradictory ideas, it is necessary to gain an overview from which one can perceive the relationship of Denk's opinions to the popular opinions of his time and from which one can evaluate the import of the whole.

Denk, like many of his contemporaries with whose intellectual development we are familiar, was influenced most strongly by the German mysticism of the middle ages—by Eckart, Tauler, and The German Theology. Mysticism is at the root of all his speculations, and he borrowed many of his ideas from this mysticism. His language reflects this influence. Since feeling dominated his other faculties, he believed that he could substitute it for them. It was feeling that evoked his peculiar convictions, often hardly compatible with Christian teachings and still more often flagrantly contradictory to the Church doctrine to which Denk's teachings seemed to pertain. It was feeling that caused him to hold to a principle diametrically opposed to Protestant dogma.

In its battle with the papacy, Protestantism had proclaimed the absolute authority of the Scriptures supreme over all the human authority of the pope and of the Church. All friends of the Reformation had accepted wholeheartedly this principle, which had become the standard, the rallying point of the new Church. All those who refrained from accepting this principle, who contested or denied it, were regarded as adversaries, impious persons, infidels.

However, Denk did not worry about public censure, dangers, or the persecution in store for him. Filled with a heroic courage worthy of a better cause, he raised another banner. He opposed the principle of the absolute authority of the written word and of its omnipotence. He also opposed the doctrine of human impotence. He proposed the principle of the inferiority of the external written word to the internal living Word, of man's inherent moral fortitude, and of the futility of any other means of salvation. He said that we have within us the living Word of God, strong, eternal, not of this world; that the Word is not perishable, for it is God and consequently spirit.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, everything that is not a result of the Word's influence, every work that does not issue from the Word, is without value.

This ideology is the foundation of all of Denk's writings. His theology, his soteriology, his anthropology, and all of his personal opinions are rooted in this ideology and grow out of it.

Now let us examine more closely the religious and philosophical theories reflected in Denk's works. Let us trace them as clearly and accurately as possible in order to arrive at the source of all theological systems. By this pursuit we shall discover the true theology, we shall find God, we shall observe how He manifests Himself.

According to Denk, God is the primary source of all creatures. All were perfectly created, for God is good and perfect; if He were not good and perfect, He would not be God. It follows that, if man is bad, if he is sinful, he is bad or sinful by his own will, and if he has thrown himself into the arms of death, even before death existed, God did not create this circumstance; He remains no less good and perfect. It is not God who is the cause of sin. It is not God who prompts the creature to transgress His laws. On the contrary, God gives the creature strength and grace to change, to turn from evil by following the inner light, the invisible Word written from the beginning in the heart of every man.<sup>55</sup>

This divine Word confirms the man who accepts it and follows its leadings as the child of God, heir of the kingdom and of the glory of the Father. The man who rejects it, on the other hand, is led by himself to perdition; he is damned. (The significance of this term will become apparent later.) Man is free to choose between these two paths, for God does not ask for a reluctant or obligatory following.<sup>56</sup>

It is immediately discernible that in Denk's thinking the expression "Word of God" has a special and peculiar significance. Denk uses the expression neither as "logos," the "Christ become flesh" in the Biblical sense,



nor as the Holy Scriptures; instead, he uses the phrase to signify man's divine heritage, the invisible, spiritual gift in the heart of each individual from his inception. The nature of this "Word of God" was made manifest only at the birth of the human race, and this same Word will return to the Creator when mankind is no more. One is almost convinced that for Denk the Word is simply conscience, the inner voice, the moral sentiment innate in the human heart.

However, Denk's concept is more complex. If there is an element of the divine and eternal not only in the nature of man but in the nature of all creatures, must not these creatures possess at least some divine attributes? This is, in fact, Denk's position. He ascribes to man domination over all, justice, and charity<sup>57</sup> as attributes of the divine nature. However, Denk goes no farther, so that there is no allusion to pantheism, the source of the divine inner voice idea. Was the author aware of the dangers of his line of reasoning, or was he using these expressions as a result of independent thinking?

Another no less important point requires clarification. Only the living Word of God, emanating from God, produces the good works that man can do during his life on earth. The question arises, If man has this ability, if of himself he can achieve the desired goal, of what value is the new religion revealed by Christ? If every man is a leader and a redeemer unto himself, if he possesses an instinct strong enough to save himself, to propel him relentlessly toward virtue, the light, the truth, and finally God, why was Christianity introduced into the world? Why should man not accept paganism, Judaism, or Mohammedanism? These religions offer equal opportunity for salvation. Since Denk seldom concerned himself with the opinion of others, he did not respond to these objections justifiably raised.

Recognition of man's innate gifts leaves no doubt of the author's point of view or of his inclinations. How then did Denk evaluate the advent of Christ, and what did he perceive to be its purpose? Christ's mission was not to reveal our true relationship with God through a new communion with Him as Christianity teaches. Why do we need such a revelation if the divine law which is in us teaches us our duty to God? Christ was not sent to redeem us, for why would we need a Redeemer if the invisible and living Word gives the strength needed to dwell in God's will? No! Christ came to earth only to serve as a model, an example, in whose footsteps we should follow. Through his personality the invisible Word is most brilliantly manifested. He was so filled with love for God that he was called Savior of his people, and his complete union with the Supreme Being gave rise to the belief that all the acts of this man were the acts of God, that all the suffering, pain, privations that he endured reflected his love of God.

The love of man for God is the strongest and most intense human love. For him who wants to attain true love, Jesus of Nazareth represents perfect union with Divinity, the only infallible guide. Since Christ's love was perfect, he is the best example for those who want to be united with God, who want to be saved.<sup>58</sup>

Christ is thus a man like any of us but is different from us because his union with God is of a singular and intimate nature. We should and we can follow his lead and become like him by uniting with him in the love of God. If we do not follow him, if we do not achieve the supreme goal, we must bear the blame, and we will suffer the consequences.

Thus man enjoys moral liberty. By his own efforts and not by divine grace alone, as Lutheran theology claimed, he could attain salvation. The redemptive death of Christ is bypassed without comment; only the life of Christ has significance for us. These propositions which even in our day of more liberal theologies would not be generally accepted must have shocked Denk's contemporaries and provoked an excessively passionate resistance, especially from Lutheran theologians. Surely such resistance was to be expected, for the speculation of Denk and his associates at last negated doctrines considered among the most important. Indeed, how could a doctrine which denied the deity of Christ and which revered him only as the best example or as the perfect man, which attributed man's actions to the exercise of his free will, which ignored salvation through the expiatory death of Christ—how could such a doctrine escape being classified as heresy?

Yet this doctrine was Denk's rationale. His beliefs were the logical conclusions at which he arrived by his line of reasoning. What need exists for extraordinary divine revelations if divine revelation is given continuously and if the invisible inner Word enlightens and saves those who allow themselves to be led by this living guide?

Another doctrine, that of the Trinity, must have been abnegated or at least modified by Denk's rationale, but his exact interpretation of the Godhead will never be known because in all of his writings he avoided clarifying his view.<sup>59</sup>

After while Denk began to express his opinions regarding Christ in less intolerant and less restrictive terms. He came to recognize the value and even the necessity of Christ's death, but Denk always emphasized the example of charity provided for us and the call to charitable works rather than a simple belief in the historical fact.<sup>60</sup>

Denk disagreed with still other points made by the Reformation theologians. Like several of his contemporaries, he reserved for human reason several rights denied by his adversaries. With regard to free will, he took a stand in opposition to the principles of Saint Augustine, accepted without question by Luther and his friends. Denk defended free will against the submissive will preached by the reformers; consequently, once again he denounced the doctrine of original sin, which he had already rejected as a result of his belief in the invisible inner Word. Nevertheless, he did not contend that man could accomplish good works on his own initiative; on the contrary, Denk strongly asserted that he who wants to do good and to live in God needs divine power and grace, without which his most persistent efforts would not bear fruit.<sup>61</sup>

Thereafter, it is evident that most of the adherents of Saint Augustine were much less tolerant in their attacks on Denk than were the Pelagians, who rejected only Denk's proposition of moral liberty which emanates from free will. However, to the Pelagians the acts of God far transcended the exercise of the free will. Thus if man must rely partly upon his own decisions and the exercise of his own will and partly upon God's help and Christ's example to turn from evil, to avoid it, to flee from it, to struggle constantly for righteousness, then evil truly exists. But what are the cause and the origin of evil? How did it come into the world? How can sin and the holiness of God coexist? These questions, often debated before and after Denk, arose for him also, and he too sought answers in a document<sup>62</sup> which we shall scan to acquaint ourselves with his surprising solutions and singular elucidations.

It is often argued that God, who is in all creatures and who fills them, is also a prime motivator of their actions both good and bad, that he produces and works evil as well as righteousness, sin as well as virtue. Denk does not support this proposition, which he endeavors to explain and rectify. He accepts that, if God had created nothing, evil would not exist, but since evil exists, it does not necessarily follow that God is the author. How could He, the Supreme Being, the Perfect One, create anything of evil? Surely then wickedness does not emanate from God, and, if men commit evil deeds, they act on their own initiative and in spite of the will of God, who would be acting contrary to His nature and would be destroying His kingdom if He created wickedness. Punishment of sins would be unjust if men were entrapped by some alien force to commit them, and, even if God commuted the penalty which consistently follows transgression, men would not be obliged to show gratitude to a tormentor.<sup>63</sup>

A question arises concerning commission and consent. What difference does it make whether God allowed evil to be created by some other agent or whether He created evil Himself? Is not the receiver of stolen goods guilty of theft? Since God could have restrained men from creating evil but did not intervene, He alone is responsible!

To this charge Denk responded that God's indulgence was wiser than restraint. God could have prevented the commission of sin only by pulling and pushing man toward righteousness, as one might act upon a stone or a piece of wood. Consequently, men would not have recognized or appreciated His grandeur and goodness, for, if they did not know sin, they would imagine themselves perfect as He is perfect. Therefore, it was better to allow men to sin than to restrain them from sinning.<sup>64</sup> Never will it be possible to attribute sin to God, for indeed it does not exist for Him. In fact, the word "sin" can be understood in two different senses: it can signify good or evil. If sin is evil, it is nothing before God, since it exists without His cooperation. If sin is good, it comes from God, has its origin in Him, and is used by Him as punishment for His creatures.<sup>65</sup>

This rather hazy distinction between good and bad sin is further explained later, and it is easy to conclude from the subsequent pages that by the expression "bad sin" Denk means true sin, the transgression of divine laws, whereas by "good sin" he means sorrow, misfortune, earthly suffering, sent by God as chastisement for the misdeeds of humanity. In this sense Denk uses the word "sin" to include physical illness, which can easily be attributed to God not as a true evil in His eyes but as an example of His justice. On the contrary, true evil, or moral evil, the "bad sin," is nothing before God. He did not create it, and, if He punished men because, as the saying goes, they are bad, they have really done nothing, and they are punished just as lazy and slothful students are chastized by their school master.<sup>66</sup>

However, Denk hastens to add that this concept is not generally understood. Only he whose spirit is intimately united with God; who no longer allows himself to be influenced by worldly affections; who remains calm and tranquil under the cruelest circumstances of life; who is resigned, as Jesus was at Gethsemane; in short, only he who has attained the highest degree of mysticism can understand these words. It is from this mysticism that the multiple sense of the word "Gelassenheit" derives. Denk borrowed this word from his medieval mentors and used it often.<sup>67</sup>

The origin of these principles is readily discernible, and it is interesting to note that two lines of reasoning leading in opposite directions with

respect to religious life converge. Through mysticism, God is perceived everywhere, in the smallest detail of the physical, intellectual, or spiritual realm. Through materialism, man is perceived to be a thief, a brigand, a murderer, who engages in both good and evil--the good in his own interest, the evil in relation to others. God, on the other hand, does nothing. Men can punish crime; God cannot. Mysticism, like Denk's doctrine, teaches that God does not recognize sin, that it is nothing, or, as Sebastian Frank argues, that sin in the eyes of God is not sin. Each line of reasoning leads to the same conclusion.

The opinions of Denk on the nature and origin of sin are now understood. Still to be considered is the fate of the sinner. Just as Denk rejected the existence of moral evil, he also rejected the orthodox concept of eternal suffering reserved for the transgressor of the law. At this point care must be taken not to fall into gross error by agreeing with Denk. According to his contemporaries, Denk restated the theory of final conversion, of a general salvation from which no one--not sinners or even the devil himself--would be excluded. This theory had been supported especially by Origin. Although Denk and Origin found a large area of agreement, there was a significant difference in the views of the two thinkers. Based on a misinterpretation of I Corinthians 3:15, Origin's view was that, although all men are not called individually unto salvation, all would attain salvation, if not during their life on earth, at least after long periods of trials and purification, and that all would take part in the reign of Christ during the millenium following Christ's return.

On the other hand, Denk states that the process of individual purification takes place in the present life, for hell burns in the heart of every man who sins, and he need not search for it outside himself or at some time after death. Denk sees death as the gateway to a better life, where man will be rewarded for battles well fought and for his struggle against the evil that ensnares him. The reward is for everyone without exception. No matter how great a sinner a man may be, the Father's hand draws him, so to speak, to reunite with God and to fulfill his destiny.<sup>68</sup> What a difference between Denk and Origin! What a contradiction also between Denk and daily experience, which reveals that few die in Christ, while many do not reach the goal post, or finish the race.

Another field of theology, less speculative than that which has already been reviewed, indicates other significant differences between Denk and his orthodox adversaries. A consideration of the sacraments and of some religious and civil institutions will reveal these differences.

The Christian Church, like other religious communions, offers the faithful various special procedures for coming to know God and for entering into an intimate union with Him. These procedures are called means of grace. Through them the divine spirit reveals faith and enhances the Christian life. However, agreement as to their significance and efficacy has never existed. Disagreement was especially pronounced during the period of the Reformation. The history of the long and deplorable battles to which the difference of opinion regarding Holy Communion and baptism led is well known. Denk's personal views with respect to these subjects are shared by a few but rejected by many. Most significant to his theology were his doctrine regarding God's Word and his view of the Holy Scriptures, doctrines already partially defined, for they evolve from the primary assumption of his theological system.

According to Denk, the human spirit, by its nature, responds to the inner living Word, whose guidance and inspiration are always with us. The exterior written word, into which some worldly elements have been introduced, is much inferior. Our well-being does not issue from the exterior word, which cannot change a sinner or enlighten him or render him knowledgeable. A pious man, filled with zeal for the divine, with a heart quickened by the living Word, does not need the exterior word, for all things call him to his purpose. Man can be saved without the Scriptures and without the Church.<sup>69</sup> This position aligns Denk with other enthusiasts of his period. It is evident that Hetzer held similar ideas, and Sebastian Frank assumed the same stance in attributing a spiritual and mystical sense to the Scriptures, which must be explained with the help of the divine spirit which is in us. However, Denk probably arrived at his belief under the influence of Muntzer and as a result of Denk's stay in Nuremberg. It is noteworthy that this self-proclaimed prophet Muntzer held that his revelations were inspired by the inner Word, that which plays such an important role in the thinking of Denk.

For Denk, love for God and charity toward men are the essence of Christianity. Any act which is not prompted by these sentiments is inconsequential to him and of no religious or moral value. To believe that one draws nigh to God or improves through ceremonies such as baptism or Communion is to be superstitious. Christians who do not observe these rites do not harm themselves. There is much more danger in abusing than in neglecting these practices.

Consequently, it is not surprising that Denk in his early writings indicated that baptism is unnecessary. The first and most important concern of the apostles of Jesus, Denk said, was to teach and to recruit disciples for

the master. To baptize someone before he has become a disciple is to indicate that baptism is more important than instruction and knowledge of the Christ; in short, such baptism is anti-Christian.<sup>70</sup> In Denk's later writings, he did not prohibit baptism; instead, he accepted it as an entry and a reception into the communion of the faithful, although not all of those who are baptized can be numbered among the faithful. Infant baptism, on the other hand, was not ordained by Jesus Christ. It represents human law and is left to the realm of Christian liberty. Whether children are baptized or are not baptized, no harm is done. The practice is insignificant.<sup>71</sup>

Holy Communion is no more or less efficacious and necessary than is baptism, but since Denk's understanding of Communion is the same as Zwingli's,<sup>72</sup> there is no need to explore Denk's doctrine.

Two other criticisms leveled by Denk and by all others of Anabaptist persuasions pertain less to the religious sphere than to civil and political order. Both the oath and secular and ecclesiastical authority were considered to be ineffective and even dangerous for the Christian. Denk observed so many abuses of the oath and of authority that he rejected the need for either.<sup>73</sup> He failed to recognize that, in a world swayed by errors and passions, both the oath and authority must be in force, and that a disintegration or abolition of authority in particular would lead to very grave troubles. What kind of social order Denk had in mind is not known, since he did not propose an alternative in his writings. However, the horrors that took place wherever the Anabaptists held the upper hand suggest that the old order was much better than the new.

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Denk's relationship to the reformers has become evident. As their new doctrines became accepted and began to form the basis of an incipient orthodoxy, his free spirit led him imperceptibly to the denunciation of a legalistic Christianity. In contrast to the interpretation of the reformers, Denk's interpretation was subjective and characterized by the attributes already mentioned.

Denk was not the only thinker of his time to entertain these views. Sebastian Frank, his noteworthy contemporary who shared some of Denk's beliefs, drew the same conclusions. Still others, Erasmus foremost among them, agreed more or less with the objections raised by Denk. Yet these men did not all follow the same line of reasoning. Frank and Erasmus pursued a rational and scientific approach. They were indignant that the supporters of the Reformation did not fully examine Christian dogma and

that they were seriously impeding the growth of science and letters, which Frank and Erasmus perceived to offer the only means of progress.<sup>74</sup>

On the other hand, mysticism, the controlling influence for Denk and his friends, gave rise to the concept of constant divine revelation in the human spirit. Through this doctrine, which undermined ecclesiastical dogma, Denk made a surprising contribution to modern philosophical systems. Denk's theories are readily identified as the precursors of those which later became popular. Indeed, from page to page rationalism on one side shakes hands with mysticism and pantheism on the other. It is not surprising that Denk's attacks against the Church and her doctrines raised the ire of the orthodox theologians.

Nevertheless, let us not be misled; many of the ideas which three centuries ago were considered as dangerous heresies and anti-Christian are now generally accepted by theological science as inherent in the spiritual life and conscience. Modern liberal theology has often shown renewed interest in truth discerned by Denk's perceptive spirit and has elucidated and given a place of honor to the long rejected ideas. Their authors and defenders, put to shame by their contemporaries, now enjoy the more impartial judgment of an enlightened posterity, who sometimes view Denk and his associates as noble and generous but always as worthy of respect. In addition to the ideas discussed are others which we do not wish either to defend or to justify. Let us not judge too quickly. Let us not think that whatever has been called heresy in the past must be considered heresy by us. Let us not forget that the Gospel proclaims charity to be the finest of Christian virtues.



## THESES

### I

The Holy Scriptures are the best source from which knowledge of God is gained.

### II

They are not the only source, for "the spirit bloweth where it listeth, and you hear the sound of its voice, but you know not whence it cometh, or whither it goeth." (John 3:8)

### III

Belief in a theological proposition which leaves the heart cold and indifferent does not justify.

### IV

To die to sin, to live the life of Christ, to be inseparably united to him constitutes the faith which saves.

### V

Union with Christ does not eradicate the human personality.

### VI

The visible Church cannot claim infallibility. The history of dogmas verifies this statement.

### VII

Only the invisible Church, the communion of saints, forever and everywhere the same, can profess infallibility.

### VIII

The human spirit must never regard as absolute truth those conclusions based on speculations with respect to divinity. If humanity had respected this truth, many religious persecutions would have been avoided, and the Christian Church would have drawn closer to its ideal, defined by the Gospels.

### IX

The doctrine of redemption by the death of Christ is the fundamental doctrine of Christianity, but man cannot explain the relationship between the death of God's son and the forgiveness of sins.

## X

The exegesis of the Church Fathers is singularly erroneous in deducing from the Old and New Testaments the doctrine of the Trinity as it is accepted by the Church.

## XI

Protestant theologians of the 17th and 18th centuries were wrong to dissect with the scalpel of their own rationality even the most insignificant aspect of the life of the spirit. They were wrong to insist upon only one means and kind of salvation. They forgot that God entrusted different talents to men. One individual is soon saved; another seeks salvation during his entire lifetime.

THE END

## FOOTNOTES

1. According to some accounts he came from the Palatinate; according to others, from Bavaria. He was also known by the surname "Bavarus."--See Bock, Historia Antitrinitariorum, vol. II, p. 238.

2. Vadianus, "Epistola ad Zuiccium Constantiensem," August 1, 1540, in Fussling, Beiträge zur Historie der Kirchenreformation; vol. V, p. 397.

3. I recall even now, my friend Œcolampade, what good will you showed toward me when I was living here at Curio's establishment; I remember in how friendly, how familiar and brotherly a fashion you first welcomed me, and then, once welcomed, took me to your heart.--See Will, Beiträge zur frankischen Kirchengeschichte, p. 5, and Studien und Kritiken, 1851, p. 4. Heberlé, Johann Denk und sein Büchlein "vom Gesetz Gottes."

4. "He had several of my lectures on Isaiah." Letter from Œcolampade to Pirkheimer at Nuremberg.--See Will, Beiträge, p. 9.

5. This information comes from Œcolampade's letter, cited earlier. In response to Pirkheimer's accusations, it is therein stated: "Denk drank no poison of my administration, if he drank poison. I imagine that I discussed many things concerning rites with him. On the Eucharist, Denk and I had no discussion; yet it was about a decade ago that I used to hear certain very learned men doing a lot of talking in corners on that subject. From them he too perhaps got what he got."--Basel, April 25, 1525. In Herzog, Leben Œcolampade's.

6. See Will, Beiträge, p. 6, and Heberlé, Joh. Denk.

7. Because he carries on with women (he must have had as many as twenty-three). Sebastian Frank, Chronik, 1523, fol. 416 and ff., and Bock, Hist. Antitr., II, p. 231.

8. Ibid.

9. Here are some rhymes on the doctrine of the Trinity. Sebastian Frank has preserved them in his Chronicle.

I alone am God  
Who without assistance created all things.  
Do you ask how many there are of me?  
I am one, I am not three.  
Without delusion, a true assertion,  
I know nothing at all of Person.  
I am neither this nor that.  
He to whom I do not myself reveal  
Remains captive to ignorance's unbroken seal.

Chronik, p. 415.

10. Frank, Chronik, p. 415.

11. Frank, Chronik, p. 416.

12. Schutzrede wider das gaistlose, sanftlenbende Fleisch zu Wittenberg.

13. The simultaneous presence of Denk and Hetzer at Nuremberg is confirmed by the report of the Anabaptist Jean Schlaffer, put to death in 1528 at Schwaz. He said in his defense: "At Nuremberg I saw Ludwig Hetzer and Hans Denk, two sincere men who are divinity scholars." In Ottius, Annales anabaptistici, ad annum 1528, p. 46. Schlaffer did not mention Müntzer because Müntzer did not come to Nuremberg until the end of 1524.—See Strobel, Thomas Münzer, p. 64; Will, Beiträge, p. 32 and p. 41.

14. "At Nuremberg a schoolmaster at St. Theobald's Church has maintained that the Holy Ghost and the Son are not co-equals with the Father; he has on this account been harassed and ejected from the town."—Dated February 6, 1525. Letters of Zwingli, vol. I, p. 470.

15. Will, Beiträge, p. 17. Heberlé, Joh. Denk.

16. Luther, in a letter (of February 15, 1525) to Jean Brismann, in Königsberg, portrayed perfectly the characteristics of the sect: "Satan, thanks to these prophets, is making such headway that now at Nuremberg some of the citizens are saying that Christ is nothing, that God's word is nothing; they are repudiating baptism and the sacrament of the altar—likewise civil authority. They admit only that God exists. For this they have been thrown in prison."—See Strobel, Th. Münzer, p. 67; Another letter from the reformer to Spengler, one of the most influential citizens of the

free city, who had asked Luther's advice as to how these same men should be treated, expressed a characteristic tolerance which, unfortunately, his successors too often lacked. He said: "You ask me how they are to be punished. I do not consider them blasphemers, but I regard them as I do the Turks or misled Christians who are not to be severely punished by the civic authority, but by a more moderate punishment. They, however, will not acknowledge or obey any civic authority, and thus everything they had and are is confusion."--Strobel, Ibid., p. 68.

17. Some excerpts from these letters are recorded by Will, Beiträge, p. 13.

18. In his letter of April 25, 1525, already cited, Œcolampade wrote to Pirkheimer: "Denk wrote last month that a teaching position at Mülhausen in Thuringia had been assigned to him."--See Will, Beiträge, p. 14.

19. Ottius, Annales anab., ad ann. 1525, p. 34.

20. See Erbkam, Geschichte der protestantischen Sekten, p. 543, and ff.

21. Here is how, several years after the death of Denk, Vadianus evaluates him: "In Denk, that most excellent young man, were all such distinguished qualities as might have made him outshine his generation and seem even greater in his own right. But he so misused his talent as to defend with might and main Origen's opinion concerning the eventual deliverance and salvation of the damned, etc."--See Vadianus, "Epistola ad Zuiccium" in Füsslin, Beiträge.

2. Heberlé, Joh. Denk.

23. Bock, Hist. Antitrin., II, p. 233--Heberlé, Joh. Denk.

24. See Heberlé, Joh. Denk.

25. Pierre Gynoræus, pastor at Augsburg. He wrote to Zwingli in a letter of August 22, 1526: "I have appended to this a certain German pamphlet authored by one Hans Denk who is living here after being proscribed at Nuremberg for some seditious activities or other, a man remarkably pestilential and slippery, who is leading not a few astray, with the result that the Augsburgers are concerned. He is maintaining, among other things, that scripture is no way necessary for us, that demons in the end are also to be saved--according to Origen's teaching; or, to put the

whole thing in perspective for you, he is the leader of the re-baptised. These items I got partly from him--although by a moment later he was changing his words--partly from others, etc.”--Letters of Zwingli, I, p. 531. However, since the accuser was not morally irreproachable, the report is questionable. Denk’s critic was trying to woo Zwingli by portraying Denk, Zwingli’s adversary, as very shady and abject.--See Heberlé, J. Denk.

26. “Der Wiedertäufer Lehr und Geheimniss aus heiliger Schrift widerlegt durch Justum Menium”, 1530. In the collection of German works of Luther, vol. II, p. 292. Here is how this ceremony was performed among Denk’s followers. “Those who follow Hans Denk practice the following: Before they baptize a convert, they conjure up seven evil spirits with which he had been possessed and renounce the spirits. After he has renounced the seven evil spirits, Denk’s followers conjure up seven good spirits which the convert accepts and cultivates. When the convert has satisfied all requirements, he is given the covenant or baptism. The seven evil spirits are these: human reference, human wisdom, human comprehension, human ability, human rationality, human strength, and human redemption. The seven good spirits are divine reference, divine wisdom, etc.”

27. Letter from Capito to Zwingli. December 10, 1526, in Letters of Zw., I, p. 579.

28. Rœhrich, Geschichte der Reformation im Elsass, I, p. 336 and ff.

29. Rœhrich, Ibid.

30. Rœhrich, Ibid.

31. Letter from Capito to Zwingli, December 10, 1526, in Letters of Zwingli, I, p. 572.

32. Letter from Capito to Zwingli, December 26, 1526, Ibid., p. 579.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.

35. Letter from Capito to Zwingli, December 26, 1526.

36. Letter from Nicolas Sigelsspach to Œcolampade, from Bergzabern, dated April 1, 1527; in Füsslin, “Epistolæ reformatorum ecclesiæ helveticæ”, Centuria I, p. 50.

37. Ibid.

38. "A Sincere Warning of the Strasbourg Clergy Concerning the Articles Which Jacob Kautz Has Published", fol. A, III.

39. Here is the title of this apologetic work: "A Sincere Warning of the Strasbourg Clergy Concerning the Articles Which Jacob Kautz, Preacher at Worms, Recently Published, the Fruit of the Scriptures and God's Word, Child Baptism and Redemption in Our Lord Jesus Christ, and Other Matters in Which Hans Denk and Other Anabaptists Have Seriously Erred"--with the epigraph: "Prove the spirits whether they are from God, because there are many false prophets abroad in the world."--It appeared in Strasbourg July 2, 1527.

40. His successor was Leonard Brunner, also recommended by the Strasbourg theologians. Kautz came to Strasbourg in 1529. He was imprisoned and expelled sometime later from the city.--See Pauli, Geschichte der Stadt Worms, p. 337, and Rœhrich, I, p. 341.

41. Seb. Frank, Chronik, p. 410.

42. OEccolampade's letter, November 9, 1528, in Bock, Hist. Antitr., II, p. 241.

43. Panzer, Annalen der ältern deutschen Literatur etc., vol. II, p. 460.

44. Panzer, Ibid.

45. Here are the essentials: I. Concerning the foreknowledge and the foreordination of God: His impartial mercy. II. Concerning the two paths for man--one to life, the other to death. III. Concerning hell, which God overcomes. IV. Concerning eight blessings....VII. Concerning the freedom and the bondage of the will...X. Concerning the Trinity, unity and oneness in the Triune God. XI. Concerning the abomination and idolatry of the ecclesiastical schisms, without worship in spirit or in truth., etc.

46. The edition which we saw is of the same year; it was printed by Silvain Ottmann, in fol., Augsburg.

47. Allow us to cite the reformers' opinions (Zwingli's as well as Luther's) of this book. One will see that they were anything but impartial. The Swiss theologian expresses himself in this manner: "Who is not offended and repulsed by this translation which has been published by the

radical sect leaders, sect leaders who cause more confusion in the church than the papacy ever caused?" Luther states his point of view in the following way: "I thus believe that no false prophet of sectarian spirit can truly translate. This is apparent in the Prophets of Worms. There must have been Jews who worked on this translation, because Christ is shown no great honor. Otherwise, industry and ability are not lacking in the work."—In Bock, Hist. Antitrin. vol. II, p. 232.

48. Arnold, Kirchen und Ketzerhistorie, Part 2, book 16, chapter 21, section 15.—And Füsslin, Beiträge zur Historie der Kirchenreform, vol. 5, p. 372.

49. Arnold and Füsslin, Ibid.

50. Bock, Hist. Antitrin., II, p. 242.—Riederer, Nachrichten zur Büchergeschichte etc., II, p. 396.

51. Arnold, Ibid.

52. Füsslin gives a concise extract of it. Beiträge, V, p. 137 and ff.

53. Arnold, Kirchen- und Ketzerhistorie, and Füsslin, Beiträge, V, p. 372.

54. Widerruf, fol. A, p. 4.

55. "We know that God is truly good and that if He were not good (which of course is impossible) He would not be God. Because He is good, He has made all things good. Insofar as man is evil, he is not evil because God causes him to be evil. Man is evil of himself, apart from God. Man, because of his own guilt, was condemned to die. Originally, there was no death because God had not created it. God remains what He is—good. God gives everyone opportunity, grace, and ability to repent. God gives no one a cause to sin. For the light, the Word of God, which is invisible, illumines the hearts of all people born into the world."—Ordnung Gottes und der Creaturen Werk, fol. A, p. 6.

56. "From the beginning man has free choice. He is free to be a child of God, an heir to the Father's kingdom. Whoever rejects this heritage is condemned to judgment and condemnation, for He who desires service freely given will not coerce one against his will to serve Him, just as He coerces no one to do evil."—Ordnung Gottes etc. Ibid.

57. "Salvation is within us, but does not originate with us. Just as God is in all creatures—but does not have His origin in them, but they in Him—



God is also in me. Thus all things which pertain to God are in me—omnipotence, righteousness, mercy. If I should not believe this, I should be a liar. Nevertheless, what God has declared remains true; i.e., He fills heaven and earth—that is, all creatures.”—Ob Gott ein Ursach des Bösen sey, fol. A, p. 9.

58. “The love of God for mankind cannot be comprehended by flesh and blood unless God in a special manner reveals this truth in some people—people who are godly and who are called God’s children. They are called God’s children because they seek to imitate God as their spiritual Father. The more they demonstrate their relationship to God, the more they are esteemed by men. The more they love that Love, the more they are loved and are that much closer to salvation. Thus it has pleased the Eternal Love that the person in whom love has most perfectly been revealed should be a savior of his people—not that it were possible for a man to save mankind but that God is so united with that one in love that God’s works are his works and that this man’s sufferings are regarded as the sufferings of God. This person is Jesus of Nazareth, who is promised in the scriptures by the true God, and in due time the promise was redeemed. Therefore, whoever desires to know true love will find it nowhere more clearly manifested than in Jesus Christ.”—Von der waren Lieb etc., fol. A, pp. 3, 4.

59. See Ordnung Gottes und der Creaturen Werk, chapter X, fol. C, p. 3.

60. “Christ’s suffering is sufficient for all the sins of man. No one can be saved apart from the spirit of Christ. The spirit of Christ equips and arms the elect with the mind of Christ. Whoever trusts in the merits of Christ and nevertheless falls into a fleshly existence, he esteems Christ no more than the pagans esteemed their gods; i.e., he ascribes no merit to Christ’s virtues. The failure truly to honor Christ is the blasphemy which pervades the world, for whoever believes that Christ has redeemed him from sin does not want to remain in sin. To the extent that we continue in the old life, to that extent we do not truly believe. We are not perfect or innocent. Heaven and earth must pass away before the damage we have suffered, which is so great, will be corrected.”—Hans Denken Widerruff, fol. A, p. 5.

61. “Whoever says that he has not received grace from God enabling him to become pious, he is a liar, as all men are. In this point also he denies God, who pours out His mercy over all people. The natural man who seeks only to preserve his own benefit will lose out in eternity. He wishes to win and overcome before he has suffered. He wishes to believe before he comprehends belief. He wants to be redeemed without having experienced damnation. He desires life without having known death. From this mentality

arise the contradictions of those who say that they have a free will, but never do anything to please God. Others say that the will is not free in order to explain their lack of good works, although they continue to entertain and act in accordance with the concept of free will. Both of the above positions concerning the freedom of the will are distortions because they are employed on the one hand only to flatter and to inflate the ego or on the other hand to absolve from responsibility.”--Ordnung Gottes etc., chapter VII, fol. B, p. 6.

62. Ob Gott ein Ursach sei des Bösen.

63. “God spoke through the prophets: I am the Lord and none other, who makes the light and creates darkness, who makes peace and creates evil. Some interpreters interpret these words so as to make God the author of sin. They also claim that since God is in all creatures, it is He who causes all good and evil in them, as they maintain--all virtue and sin.

“It is true that had not God created the world there could have been no evil. But the claim that God created evil does not follow from His role as creator. God is good and thus He can create only good. Thus all creation created by God is good and in some respect resembles Him. When anyone sins, he does so out of his initiative and in opposition to God. If God performed evil, He would act in contradiction to His own nature and would thereby destroy His own kingdom. Man would be unjustly punished for evil for which he is not responsible. Even if God were to assume the penalty for man’s sin, He would not be worthy of our gratitude because He himself would have originally caused the evil.”--Ob Gott ein Ursach sei des Bösen, fol. A, p. 2.

64. “Would it not have been better that God had prevented sin rather than to have permitted it to come forth? But God could not have prevented sin without at the same time coercing and manipulating man like a stone or a block of wood. Such conduct, however, on the part of God would not have led to the acknowledgment and praise of His name. Why not? If God had prevented sin, man would have had a false image of himself, since he would have concluded that he was as righteous as God. Thus it is immeasurably better for God to have permitted sin than it would be for Him to have prevented it.”--Ob Gott ein Ursach sei des Bösen, fol. A, p. 3.

65. “God is in and truly works in all creatures. That God also causes sin, however, cannot be maintained. Why not? Sin may be understood in two ways--namely, that it is both (and at the same time) good and evil. Insofar as it is evil, it cannot originate in God, as God did not create evil, but insofar as evil is good, it is created by God as punishment.

"Do you respond, 'If evil then is made good by God, He is the author of evil'? The answer is: God, insofar as He causes all that one calls sin and evil, causes it only for punishment, as has already been said. If God should punish without cause and unjustly, the interpreters who claim that evil originates with God would be correct. But who can make such a claim against God, when he does not know Him?"—Ibid., fol. A, p. 4.

66. "Do you say, 'If sin which man commits is nothing before God, why does He punish the sinner?'"

"Answer: Why does a teacher punish his pupils to prevent them from doing certain things? To do something is good. If we would do something, we would need less punishment."—Ibid., fol. A, p. 4.

67. "That evil has not been created may be learned from those who dedicate themselves to God and who desire nothing but that which God creates. Everyone, according to the measure of his commitment to God—a commitment by which all the words of God must be heard—will understand."—Ibid.

68. "The reward of the one who overcomes is the true knowledge of God and of His anointed. Thus the true friend of God recognizes that all for which he strives is accomplished not by himself but by God. All that man achieves is not achieved by bow or sword but in the power of the Spirit of God. The believer is content with God. He is established on a firm rock. No enemy can approach. No spirit can seduce him from the tranquillity which he finds in the Spirit of God, in whom he is now absorbed. In this peace, the believer is disturbed by no turmoil. Death and life are the same as far as he is concerned, and he is no longer anxious about his own estate, but he concerns himself only with his King and how he might enlist others in His service. Sin is disobedience and lack of faith. Punishment is a hardening of the heart in unbelief. When one has given himself to evil, he hates everything good and he is attracted to all impurity. The Godless then complain, 'Why did God make me this way? I can't help what I do. I would like to be redeemed like others; if God would only redeem me, let Him do so.' Thus a man links himself to hell, and whenever he encounters a righteous person, the closer that righteous person is to God, the more the sinner hates him. Finally, the sinner exclaims, 'Just as I thought—it is all a lie and a fantasy, this talk about eternal life and condemnation! We live until we die and then it is all over.'

"As soon as the godless says this, he is in the place called hell. Not that he wishes to remain in that position or, in fact, is able to do so, for even hell is naked before God, and condemnation itself offers no cover from His gaze. Then God reveals Himself in the highest expression of righteousness,

which we call anger, in order that we might experience the pangs of hell and in order that we be forced to know our misery, so that, in our wretchedness, we cry out to Him and He grants us aid. The Word of God does such a work in all of us, for it preaches condemnation in our souls and clearly reveals that we have caused our own condemnation. As soon as one comprehends this Word, he is free to carry on in his evil or to sacrifice himself in suffering. The more he resists suffering, the more he condemns himself until, at last, he is overwhelmed. The more he humbly submits to the powerful hand of God, the more God permits His work to be performed in him. Man thinks, however, that he will certainly be destroyed when the work of God is exercised in him. He becomes empty and famished and cannot be sated. From a distance he sees the bosom of Abraham. He knows that all is well, but he does not yet realize that God is so near. Salvation is at hand before we are aware of it. God places us in the pit of hell in order that we humble ourselves, weep, and realize that in and through ourselves we perish.”--Ordnung Gottes und der Creaturen Werk, chapters 2 and 3, fol. A, p. 8, and fol. B, p. 1.

69. “I esteem the Holy Scriptures over all human treasures, but not as the Word of God, which is living, powerful, and eternal. For the Word of God is as God Himself--spirit and not letter. The Word is written without pen and paper and is incapable of being erased. Thus redemption is not bound to the Scriptures regardless of their usefulness and value. Why? It is not possible for the Scriptures to improve an evil heart, even though the Scriptures may instruct such a heart. A pious heart is a spark of divine zeal, and such a heart is improved by all things. Thus a person elected by God will be saved--even without preaching and without Scripture.”--Hans Dencken Widerruf, fol. A, p. 4.

70. “That child baptism is erroneous is clearly seen from the first and most prominent proclamation of Jesus Christ: that the disciples teach and make disciples of all men, and to seek above all else the kingdom of God. We should retain this priority. Therefore, whoever baptizes someone before he has become a follower of Christ testifies by that act that he considers baptism more important than the teaching and understanding of the Gospel. Such a position is an abomination before the eyes of God.”--Von der waren Lieb et cetera, fol. B, p. 4.

71. Widerruf, art. 8, fol. B, p. 1.

72. Widerruf, art. 9, fol. B, p. 2.

73. “The exercise of power and authority is not permitted to the Christian who wishes to exalt his Lord. The kingdom of our king consists

solely in teaching and the power of the spirit. Whoever confesses Christ as Lord must do only what Christ commands. Christ commands his followers not to associate with evil doers except for the purpose of teaching and admonishing them. It is not that power of itself is evil, for the evil world will itself serve God's vengeance, but that love is a better instructor of all her children. Whoever is a father, let him deal with his wife and children, servant, and maids as he hopes God will deal with him. As much as it is possible for an authority to act out of love, it is to that extent Christian in posture."--Von der waren Lieb etc., fol. B, pp. 6, 7.

74. Hagen, Deutschlands literarische und religiöse Verhältnisse im Reformationszeitalter, vol. III, p. 246 and ff.

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